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Why care? On motivation in care ethics

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CHAPTER FOUR: VIRTUE-ORIENTATED CARE

Introduction

Virtue-orientated caring represents a break from view of the selfless or minimal self in the non-normative types of care ethics that I have hitherto described and is an elaboration of the discussion of ‘intellectual virtues’ begun in the previous chapter. Virtue-orientated caring is an approach to care ethics that is dependent on the agent himself: his character, inclinations and experience. In order to be caring, according to this ethics, the moral agent must have the requisite inclinations and character and – above all - must want to care in a virtuous manner.

This chapter represents a shift in approach to caring away from care ethics with a minimal self or with a primary emphasis on particularity, towards a type of care ethics with an enduring or stable self. I regard Dalmiya and Code in the previous chapter, as having made a start in describing a more ‘filled-in’ self. Both authors describe intellectual virtue not in terms of truth parity but in terms of character.¹ In this chapter I shall continue with this trend: in virtue-orientated care ethics, the self has specific characteristics and goals towards which he strives – he is more fleshed-out, as it were, than the normatively empty or neutral selves in the ontological, postmodern and epistemological moral theories that I have addressed thus far.

The function of this chapter is to act as a lynchpin between two contrary directions of thought in care ethics: the idea that the moral self is primarily reactive and the idea that the self is substantial and active. The idea of the self as reactive is most prominent in the personalist type of care ethics that I discuss in this dissertation. This is because, as I describe in the Introduction, care ethics distances itself from what it sees as rule-based ethics and seeks its allies among non-foundationalist and particularist theories. As I have argued throughout, I am not satisfied with the lack of normativity because it leads, to my mind, to an absence of motivation for caring and a moral theory without any normative clout.

Virtue-orientated care ethics is a step in the direction of an ethical theory with a (more) normative self. But it is a step that I am ambivalent about. As I will argue in this chapter, any virtue-orientated care ethics that is based on a

¹ Code 1984, 41 and Dalmiya 2002, 48.

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naturalistic argument - the argument that it is our nature to be caring therefore we should be caring – is questionable. I shall state my objections to this type of argument and illustrate them with examples from contemporary virtue ethics literature. I have taken the liberty of referring to two authors whose domains are relatively far removed from care ethics. First of all, Philippa Foot – the eminent British virtue ethicist and author of *Natural Goodness* (2001) – and her notion of “natural goodness” and secondly, the ex-Rhodesian/British philosopher of mind and of language, John McDowell and his distinction between “mere” naturalist and “rational” naturalist approaches. Following McDowell, I argue that “mere” naturalism is unacceptable because it brackets that which has been labelled ‘natural’ and removes it from normative discussion. Given the emphasis in this chapter on the reflective self, McDowell’s “rational” naturalism might offer an alternative type of naturalism more palatable than “mere” naturalism. I will be discussing this alternative later on in the chapter.

If virtue-orientated care ethics is possible without a naturalistic basis, then it is an ethical variety certainly worth considering. The focus on character traits and striving towards a teleological goal does, as I shall argue, provide a motivational counterweight to what I have called the ‘normative pull’ of caring. The virtuous self is not merely reactive. The New Zealand philosopher and virtue ethicist Rosalind Hursthouse and her account of virtuous reasons is of great help in providing this alternative.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: I initially follow a virtue-orientated version of caring that describes caring as a virtue and conceives of caring as a capacity or a “skill”. This is a version of care ethics that has been developed by the American virtue ethicist Raja Halwani (in “Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics”, 2003). Halwani has named three characteristics of virtue-orientated care that he believes overlap with important characteristics of virtue ethics in general. They are: a focus on agents and agents’ lives; an emphasis of emotive and natural inclinations; and the importance of social skills. I shall deal with each of these in turn. I shall pay critical attention to the naturalistic tendencies in virtue-orientated care ethics with the help of McDowell’s two types of naturalism. And I argue that virtue, described as a “stable character ascription”, goes part of the way in explaining what it is to be motivated to be caring - but not all the way.

Agents and agents' lives

Halwani argues that care ethics should be subsumed under virtue ethics and to do so would be to the advantage of care ethics. He argues that virtue ethics and care ethics share several important features and that virtue ethics is capable of lending care ethics precisely that element vitally missing from care ethics, namely normativity. By regarding caring as a virtue, he argues, caring gains a “mechanism”, as it were, “by which care can be regulated so as not to become morally corrupt”.²

The first overlap between virtue ethics and care ethics is the centrality of agents and agents' lives. According to Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (in their definitive introduction to *Virtue Ethics* 1997), virtue ethics focuses on moral agents and their lives, rather than on discrete actions (telling a lie, having an abortion, giving to a beggar) construed in isolation from the notion of character, and the rules governing these actions. Virtue ethics attempts to look at lives as a whole, at agents' characters as well as at their actions, they argue. Indeed the notion of character is key to virtue ethics – how they are acquired and how they are developed. In the words of Hursthouse, acting from virtue means that we act from “a settled state of good character”.³ Character, in this conception, is reliable or constant. It can be depended upon and appealed to.

According to Halwani, this virtue ethical notion of character could be central to care ethics. I elaborate on his reasons as follows: because care ethics distinguishes itself from rule-based ethics, it has no stable factor upon which to make judgements about caring because it prioritises three qualities: partiality, particularity and spontaneity. What Halwani argues is that character, conceived of as a stable disposition, offers a reliable perspective from which to make judgements and also does not hinder partiality, particularity or spontaneity. He argues that care ethics is typically concerned with relations of partiality:⁴ the agent acts in relation to another that the agent knows and is in relation with, such as his friend, lover or offspring. And this is precisely the element that distinguishes care from other altruistic motives that typically target strangers and perhaps acquaintances, such as benevolence or sympathy, pity or compassion. Also, what is involved in caring says Halwani, is the intimate knowledge of the person cared for. In

² Halwani 2003, 161.

³ Hursthouse 1999, 123.

⁴ Halwani 2003, 166.

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acting from care, one utilises one's knowledge for the cared for to tailor one's action to suit the needs of the cared for.

I have dealt with the (second) quality of particularity at length in Chapters Two and Three. Suffice it to say here that particularity in care ethics enables each situation to be viewed as a (unique) moment in an individual's life, in which decisions made are related to the context and specific life story of that individual, here and now. To put it differently, each (caring) action is agent-relative; its relevance and meaning are related specifically to the agent committing the action.

The third quality, spontaneity, is linked to the other two, partiality and particularity. Halwani argues that caring actions must be emotionally motivated in that they are spontaneous and immediate. This does not mean that caring actions are committed without reasons. Emotional attachment to someone is very often motivation for a caring action: we often react caringly because we are concerned about someone's safety, or their well-being. These are actions that are not learnt by rote or demanded by law; they are spontaneous in the sense that they are individual, partial and (perhaps) unique.

To conclude, Halwani argues that both virtue ethics and care ethics place agents and agents' lives at the centre of their accounts. He argues that the virtue ethical notion of character is of great use to care ethics because it offers care ethics the opportunity to introduce a reliable source of moral judgement while at the same time retaining the important aspects of partiality, particularity and spontaneity in care ethics. I would concur with Halwani that the notion of (reliable) character does offer a grip on a type of moral agent that is otherwise very difficult to localise – with his contextuality, particularity and spontaneity. But it would seem to me that the focus on character does not in itself make care ethics subsumable in virtue ethics – there must be other compatible features too.

According to Crisp and Slote, what must precede this focus on character is an account of the moral significance of inclinations. Virtue ethics is credited (by virtue ethicists like Crisp and Slote and Hursthouse) with giving a better account of the inclinations than, say, deontological or utilitarian ethics. This is because, Hursthouse argues, the virtues are concerned with actions *and* feelings (and not only actions).⁵ Care ethics, as elaborated by Nagel-Docekal

⁵ Hursthouse 1999, 108. Thereby implying that deontological and utilitarian ethics are not. I shall be addressing this issue in relation to a discussion of duty in Chapter Five.

in the Introduction, is also concerned with inclinations – this is true for personalist care ethics in any case.

Inclinations

According to Halwani, in acting from care one typically acts from one's inclinations (he uses the word "emotively" but I prefer 'inclinations'). The one caring has an attachment to the cared for and is inclined to be concerned with his well-being. The one caring is concerned with the needs of the cared for, takes pleasure in his happiness, and is sad when he is not faring well. While I certainly agree with Halwani's point that there is a degree of matching between the one caring and the cared for, I would urge that this model has its limits. I do not literally feel my daughter's pain – it is *her* pain – but I will do my best to understand what she is feeling with all my experiential and imaginative powers. Likewise, it makes me happy to see her joy but it is not her joy that I am experiencing but recognition of it. Caring without inclinations is impossible, that I concede, but the importance of inclinations for care ethics does not mean that care ethics is therefore a virtue ethics.

Does being a caring person involve having special kind of inclinations? For example, "natural inclinations"? Philippa Foot argues that having certain virtues, like charity or benevolence, is linked to having several other virtuous character traits like generosity, kindness, concern, and sympathy. Thus acting charitably, to take one example, for such a person is an act that is prompted by the having of the other traits and the desires associated with them. Likewise Lawrence Blum in his approach to friendship, altruism and morality assumes that I have the virtue of compassion if I have a compassionate character, and that I have a compassionate character if, simply, I am prone to feel and act out of compassion on suitably moving occasions.⁶ This quality of "being prone to" because of already present inclinations is what is meant by *natural* inclination. But this would mean that caring is not itself an inclination, but rather flows from having other inclinations, natural or other, like compassion, concern or empathy.

While I wholeheartedly agree that part of being motivated to care is experiencing a number of inclinations – be it the 'pull' of the claim to care, or finding someone important (we need to be moved to act, after all) – I have reservations about concurring with the idea of natural inclinations. As I shall

⁶ Blum cited in Hursthouse 1999, 100.

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be discussing in the section on two types of naturalism below, I do not believe that the precept “natural” is useful in a discussion on care ethics. “Natural” is mostly used in the sense of ‘essential’ and/or part of the foundation for the derivation of normative claims. The Scottish Enlightenment philosophers like David Hume and John Locke argued that benevolence was a natural and general human characteristic. More contemporary ethics does not proceed from any such assumption and I am inclined to argue that by assuming that any such inclination is natural to human beings does not substantially add to the debate on normativity in general. Why are some people more caring than others? If they do not possess such an inclination, does it mean that they are ‘unnatural’? And if they are, in these terms, unnatural then how could virtue ethics, or virtue-orientated care ethics address their lack of caring? Their answer to the question ‘Why don’t you care?’ would simply be: ‘Because I don’t have it in me.’ And the discussion would be closed.

Social skills

The third feature of virtue ethics that Halwani mentions overlapping with care ethics is social commitment or investment. There are differences between their approaches, however. Care ethics begins with the point that humans are ontologically relational while virtue ethics proceeds rather from the character traits of the individual - albeit for social purposes. What unites them, however, is that both ethical approaches rate relations or social skills as that which primarily motivate the moral agent. One of the main claims of virtue ethics is that we are social animals who need to negotiate the ways we are to deal and live with each other. This general claim of sociality must be recognised in addition to recognition that we need certain types of relationships without which we will not flourish, in particular with friends and family members. We need to partake in the pleasures of associating with people whom we can trust and share their joys, sorrows and activities. Without proper care human beings cannot generally grow up to lead mentally and emotionally healthy lives. In this sense, the ends and goals of intimate others constrain the ends and goals of the agent and the very conception of the agent’s life, according to Halwani.

The point of caring, in this virtue-ethical view, is that it contributes significantly towards a flourishing life and for this reason is indispensable. This is the basis of Halwani’s virtue-orientated care argument that caring is a virtue - that caring goes part of the way to constitute a flourishing life.

“Flourishing” is characteristic of a whole life or an extended period, rather than an individual and separate deed or action. What do we require in order to flourish? Halwani’s reply is consistent with a virtue ethical perspective: we need to be virtuous if we are to flourish, he says. Having or attaining virtues requires time, effort, and good upbringing. When one has virtues, one has, among other things, the (socially) appropriate values, thoughts and emotions.

Caring satisfies one of Aristotle’s criteria for being a virtue continues Halwani: namely being a “trait” one needs to flourish as a human being. Because human beings cannot grow up to lead emotionally healthy lives without being cared for properly, proper care is generally necessary if one is to flourish. Also intimate relationships are essentially characterised by caring and flourishing (among other things) and therefore, according to Halwani, the necessity of caring to a flourishing life is established. Without giving and receiving care the sociality and the rationality (mental health) of the agent is seriously endangered, he argues.⁷

Halwani’s chief point that caring is virtue is based on the argument that being cared for is necessary for flourishing lives. Though I agree with him on this point (being cared for is both biologically and psychologically necessary for humans), his argument does not justify the conclusion on the same grounds that caring for others is necessary for flourishing lives. If we take a minimal reading of Halwani’s point then we can agree that in order to have a life of any worth, it is necessary to care. As de Sousa argues: “...emotions are essentially implicated in our capacity to live a coherent and reasonably well-regulated life: unless you *care*, your life will be a mess.”⁸ If we wish to have a broader reading and infer the necessity of caring for others from the general human desire to have a flourishing life, then I fear that the term ‘necessity’ will not work. It is impossible to imagine someone who is sociable but not caring towards others - but it is not possible to argue on this basis that everyone must therefore be caring. As the care critic Sarah Hoagland argues, there is nothing binding in the role of the one caring that necessitates others to emulate this role.⁹

To conclude: I have reviewed Halwani’s reasons for arguing that care ethics should be subsumed into virtue ethics. I have touched on three aspects crucial to care ethics – its agent-relativity, the role of inclinations and the importance

⁷ Halwani, 2003, 183.

⁸ de Sousa 1987, 6. My thanks to Don Hadden for this reference.

⁹ Hoagland, 1991.

of relationality – that also overlap with virtue ethics. I argued that the notion of character as a form of stable or reliable disposition might be of use to a more normative conception of caring. This might take the form, for example: a caring person is compassionate, concerned, responsible, and empathetic (these are a few of several adjectives that could apply to a caring person). I could imagine that people with these character traits might be more inclined to be caring than someone who is self-concerned, frustrated, fickle or disinterested. But this does not mean that only people with a specific type of character can be caring, or that being caring means that you have a specific type of character. I am inclined to argue that being able to be caring is the result of a conglomeration of several character traits and that this conglomeration varies according to the circumstances that prompt the caring response. Sometimes calmness and disinterest is necessary (when pulling a splinter from a child's hand); sometimes sympathy (as listener); sometimes clarity and consistency (in matters of moral education). I would rather argue that there are (several) virtues/character traits involved in caring but that caring itself is not a stable character trait precisely because of the various and flexible nature of caring.

Furthermore, I am not satisfied with Halwani's arguments that caring is a virtue on the basis of its necessary role in a flourishing life. It is necessary – for our physical and psychological survival - that we all are cared for, during significant periods of our lives. It is desirable that we are all cared for by significant others throughout our lives - and this will indeed contribute towards a flourishing life. But does follow that it is *necessary for a flourishing life* that we all care for others? It is certainly desirable and it might be sufficient (a lot more is needed for a flourishing life than caring for others, I would argue). Is it possible to conceive of someone who does not care for anything? It is not: even the most isolated solitudinarian must care for something - even if this is only his own survival. (It has been pointed out to me that no one will discover whether or not I am correct in arguing that it is not necessary for a flourishing life. The agent who does not care for anything or anyone does so at his own peril, so he will be the only one to complain.¹⁰)

Halwani argues as follows:

...if intimate relationships are essentially characterised by caring, and if flourishing is constituted by intimate

¹⁰ Govert den Hartogh, private correspondence.

relationships (amongst other things), then the necessity of caring to a flourishing life stares us obviously in the face (Halwani “Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics”, 2002, 183.)

What Halwani is arguing is that caring constitutes intimate relations and intimate relations constitute flourishing, therefore that caring constitutes flourishing. He concludes from this that “without giving and receiving care, the sociality and the rationality (mental health) of the agent is seriously endangered.”¹¹ I disagree. I would argue that caring for others does not mean that the one-caring will have a flourishing life and this means that caring is not necessary for a flourishing life but is rather a conditional or hypothetical assumption. The only way in which Halwani’s statement makes sense is in the counterfactual form: if you are not caring then you won’t have (successful) intimate relations and therefore will not have a flourishing life. This counterfactual argument, from the point of view of my own question (what motives to be caring?), does not work: the threat of a failed life is unlikely to motivate to be caring. It is as if Halwani assumes, from the outset, that we have a choice whether we care or not. The contrary point is made so clearly and aptly by Noddings and Frankfurt: you are gripped by the cared-for in way that supersedes your will and the notions of flourishing lives or the normative success of being seized is not an issue. It is therefore not that caring is necessary for a flourishing life but that caring is necessary.

In the following section I shall put forward my objections to naturalism in virtue-orientated ethics.

Two types of naturalism

‘Natural inclination’ is perhaps one of the clearest examples of what ethicists like Sevenhuijsen and Walker are opposed to: implicit assumptions with far-reaching consequences that claim veracity beyond the realm of the empirical. Examples of ‘natural inclination’ arguments within virtue ethics are, I would argue, Foot’s assertion that humans have a natural inclination to be good;¹² Baier’s claim that good mothers need no account of obligation because they are already good;¹³ and from the terrain of care ethics, Noddings’s ontological argument that the mother-child relation is exemplary of good, caring

¹¹ Halwani 2002, 183.

¹² Foot 2001, 16.

¹³ Baier 1994, 7 - 8

relations¹⁴ and Virginia Held's use of mothering relations as the central model for her ethics of care.¹⁵ Noddings' ontology also has many overlaps with the feminist 'maternal thinkers' Sara Ruddick and Jean Bethke Elshtain (also writing in the 1980's). And the basis of all these arguments is that the relation or quality in question, the mother-child relation (or the nurturer-child) or the inherent quality of human beings, is basic and the source of normativity.

Maternal thinking is a good example of how 'mere' nature can be seen ethically. Ruddick's maternal care is a "maternal practice"¹⁶ (that includes both men and women) in which she argues that the practice of parenting (especially mothering) better expresses the dynamics of moral life than contract thinking, for example.¹⁷ As in Noddings' account of caring, the mother-child relation in maternal thinking exemplifies a relationship that is shaped by responsibility and love and nurturing, rather than by emotional detachment, objectivity and impersonality traditionally found in the morality of the public sphere.

My concern is not to refute the socio-psychological claim that the family (whatever particular form it may take), and the relation between the primary care giver and child, is an important source of moral upbringing. Rather, my concern is that the appeal to some kind of natural moral inclination short-circuits thinking critically about normativity. By labelling some morality as 'natural' it is then placed out of reach of reflection. Basing the normativity of care on its origin as a natural inclination is however a surprisingly persistent argument and difficult to refute. Nevertheless I will attempt to do so.

Take this argument about trust for example: Baier wants trust to be regarded as a virtue in the Aristotelian sense of lying on a mean between extremes. Good trust, says Baier is appropriate trustworthiness, appropriate trustingness, appropriate encouragement to trust as well as judicious untrustworthiness, selective refusal to trust, and discriminating discouragement of trust. This balance between all the extremes and varieties of trusting is a tall order, but Baier wants more. She also wants trust to be a virtue because of its special quality as a natural inclination. What does she mean by 'natural inclination'? She means, as I understand her, that to act from inclination is to act as you are prone to feel without being overtly

¹⁴ Noddings 1984.

¹⁵ Held 1987.

¹⁶ In her "Maternal Thinking" in *Feminist Studies*, 1980, 6, 342 – 67, for example.

prompted by factors outside of or beyond yourself. Thus Baier argues that it is women who are particularly well experienced in matters of trust because they are already subsumed in relations of trust with children and intimate relationships. Women have a “natural” feeling for trust, she says, because they are more vulnerable than men; they have long been exploited and dominated by men; they have been and are in relationships which, “depended on men’s trust in women and women’s trustworthiness to play their allotted role and so to perpetuate their own and their daughters’ servitude”.¹⁸

What Baier is doing, is confusing nature and nurture: as if extended (and exploitative) contact with something makes it part of human nature. Baier’s argument that women have a ‘natural feeling for trust’, to my mind, borders on a form of biological determinism: trust is natural for women because they are most intimately acquainted with its advantages and disadvantages. One could just as well argue that because coal miners spend much time underground in the dark means that they have a feeling for darkness and are therefore better at being in dark.

Not all naturalistic arguments are bad. It is possible to introduce a distinction between naturalistic arguments that rely on ‘mere’ nature – like some maternal thinkers for example - and naturalistic arguments that require the realisation that something is good because of the ‘fit’ between the natural impulses of the individual and the virtue or the reason or whatever. The phrase, “mere” naturalism, is McDowell’s.¹⁹ His example is that the facts about the nature – the “mere” nature – of wolves underlie the claim that a good wolf is one who pulls his weight in the hunt.²⁰ In other words, it is basic to the identity of wolves that their qualifying to be a good wolf is the co-operation in the vital activity of acquiring food.

Human beings might have a naturally based need for the virtues, in a sense parallel to the sense in which wolves have a naturally based need for co-operativeness in their hunting says McDowell, but this does not mean that virtuous behaviour is genuinely required by reason (as Halwani seems to be arguing that it is). The addition of reason means that it is possible to reflect on various alternative possibilities of behaviour. Even though these alternatives may never be actualised (like a wolf deciding, on reflection, not to co-operate in the hunt) and can only be considered real in the imagination,

¹⁷ Tong 1998.

¹⁸ Baier 1994, 16.

¹⁹ McDowell 1995.

it nevertheless reflects a deep connection, argues McDowell, between reason and freedom. The vital question might very well be asked: “Why should I do this?” And the answer will appeal to whatever it is that humans (or wolves supposing that they acquire rationality as McDowell whimsically does) need. What rationality does is to enable one to step back and view these needs from a critical standpoint – thus when they become reasons, their status as reasons is, by the same token, immediately open to question.

The other type of natural inclination argument mentioned by McDowell, the one that argues that there is some kind of fit between the nature of something and whose realisation transcends that, can be described as a “reflective” naturalism. It too has an internal source of goodness but it needs continual reference to outside possibilities and judgements. Foot, in her book *Natural Goodness*, takes McDowell’s critique of her earlier position as representing that of “mere” nature into consideration.²¹ She argues, for example, that the rational will is good²² and that a genuine virtue “fits the individual for his own good”.²³ In the concluding paragraph of her book, Foot introduces the sentiments as a way of reflecting on the ‘fit’ of nature and reason. She follows the philosopher David Wiggins in arguing that human sentiments are relevant: there is a way in which a good person must not only see his good as bound up with goodness of desire and action, but also feel that it is, with sentiments such as pleasure, pride and honour.²⁴ By this she means, I take it, that a person doing good will feel pleasure. I fear however that a person doing ‘bad’ might also feel pleasure – a misgiving which indicates that Foot’s argument is rife with potentially problematic moral realisms (good is a good).

But to return to the idea that caring is good because it is natural: we can now distinguish between two types of approaches that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. First, one can argue that humans are inherently relational and therefore need virtues in order to get on well with each other. This is Foot’s position on virtue²⁵ and it is also the idea behind Halwani’s argument that caring is an important virtue. Virtues, in this conception, are capacities, or “excellences” that can be developed in order to achieve a flourishing (and sociable) life.

²⁰ McDowell 1995.

²¹ McDowell’s critique is expressed in his article “Two sorts of Naturalism”.

²² Foot 2001, 66.

²³ *Op cit*, 112.

²⁴ *Op cit*, 98.

²⁵ *Op cit*, 35.

Second, one can argue that caring is naturally good because it is intrinsic to human nature. Care ethicists, like Noddings, who refer to maternal thinking regard the mother-child relation as a model for this intrinsic goodness. Daryl Koehn, an American ethicist and author of *Rethinking Feminist Ethics* (1998), typifies this approach as privileging the biological relations of reproduction and nurture. Her objection to this is that, on an empirical basis, “others have observed that reproduction itself can be seen as the selfish attempt of the parent to reproduce his or her life in the child”.²⁶ While this is biologically sound (it is reproduction after all), it is not normatively sound: narcissistic caring risks reinforcing selfishness (though it need not necessarily – not all parents are selfish). And, as I concluded in my critique of Baier, there is a real danger of committing a naturalistic fallacy because something plucked from the nature of human beings will not imply that it is morally desirable.

But to follow McDowell’s advice, what we need here is the presence of reason to create the freedom between what we might (or might not) naturally feel inclined to do and what we choose to do. Halwani, in his favour, argues for a combination of reason and caring: he argues that reason has an important regulative role to play in intimate relationships because reason can assess whether intimate relationships are morally desirable²⁷ - but he does insist at the same time that caring is natural. As an alternative to naturalist arguments, I will explore Hursthouse’s argument that acting virtuously, and believing that this is the right way of acting, is another way of being morally motivated.

How does Virtue Motivate?

Rosalind Hursthouse, in her book *On Virtue Ethics* (1999, especially chapters 4 through to 7) has an alternative to the naturalist quandary of virtue: the virtuous person does not act from inclination, she argues, but from reason. Her critique of acting from inclination that follows will lead, to my mind, to a very graceful combination of virtue and reason.

What does it mean ‘to act from inclination’, asks Hursthouse? She begins by thinking of certain emotions, say sympathy, compassion and love, as good and nice ones. Without having to answer the question as to what such an emotion is, or what it is like to feel one, we can say that each

²⁶ Koehn 1998, 43.

²⁷ Halwani 2003, 161.

characteristically involves such desires as the desire to help others, to comfort them in their affliction, to give them what they want and need. In other words, we can say that these emotions motivate one to do such things, and also that they characteristically involve emotional reactions – felt pain and sorrow at another’s pain or grief, felt pleasure or joy at another’s pleasure or joy. There are however important differences between people: some are very prone to feel these emotions, others very little or not at all. This seems to indicate a difference in their characters: the former are charitable or benevolent; the latter callous and selfish. So we might regard possessing the virtue of charity as being very prone to feeling these emotions on suitable occasions. A further difference between people is that some are very prone to feeling these emotions without being prompted into action by them, whereas others need to be prompted. Thus possessing the virtue of charity is being very prone not only to feeling but to acting from the emotions of sympathy, compassion, and love, prompted by the desires associated with them. (Possessing the virtue *x* is being very prone to feel and act from the emotions of *a*, *b*, and *c*.)

Can one possess the virtue but not the appropriate character? Hursthouse argues that someone who tends to help others and to spread happiness around, but feels no joy over their joy or sorrow when she cannot help, lacks the virtue in question. For an emotion to be a virtue, it requires the appropriate feeling. To be virtuous from inclination means, for example, that in order to have the virtue of compassion I must have a compassionate character.

The problem with the notion of virtue being dependent on inclination, I would think, is that even people with benign inclinations are liable to go wrong in a number of ways. They are liable to go wrong because the emotions are (sometimes) unreliable as sources of acting well. In short, the emotions of sympathy, compassion and love, viewed simply as psychological phenomena, are no guarantee of right action, or acting well. There is nothing about them, *qua* natural inclinations, which guarantees that they occur “in complete harmony with reason”, that is, that they occur when, and only when, they should, toward the people whose circumstances should occasion them, consistently, on reasonable grounds and to an appropriate degree (as Aristotelian virtue requires). Moreover, when they are fortunate enough to hit on something beneficial and right, they still need to be regulated by experience and good judgement, namely ‘practical wisdom’. They may prompt one to a good end, but the agent still has to be good at deliberation to be (reasonably) sure of attaining it, and the good of others, though a desirable

end, is not the only good to be pursued in acting well. Someone's welfare, a desirable end, might not best be achieved by means of goodness alone.

No, the virtuous agent does not act from inclination but from reason, concludes Hursthouse. However this is not to relegate the emotions to an insignificant role. On the contrary, Hursthouse argues that she thinks that the emotions are morally significant. This statement is made up of three claims, she says: first, that the virtues (and vices) are morally significant. Secondly, that the virtues (and vices) are all dispositions not only to act, but to feel emotions, as *reactions* as well as impulses to action. And thirdly, that in the person with the virtues, these emotions will be felt on the *right* occasions, towards the *right* people or objects, for the *right* reasons, where 'right' means 'correct'.

What the third claim introduces is the crucial notion of feeling emotions rightly or correctly where 'correctness' is a cognitive notion achieved in a moment of reflection. Hursthouse's claim is that full virtue involves feeling emotions correctly and that this would not be possible without the influence of reason. For, in virtue of our reason, we draw the distinction between what appears to us to be so, and what is really so - in language. We can express our ideas or thoughts or perceptions about generic good and evil in sentences which figure, in our languages, as expressions of how things appear to us to be - as beliefs which are up for assessment as true or false, correct or erroneous, reasonable or unreasonable.

The best connection between virtue and the emotions is education, says Hursthouse. Language has to be taught and therefore moral education and upbringing is an essential part of the formation of a virtuous agent. If we can't come up with the right emotional reactions, then we fail people who tell us that they have suffered or what they have endured. This is a moral failure. Equally so, the person who is thoroughly cold-hearted as an adult is responsible for his indifference (unless they are psychologically incapable of doing so). We bear, in this sense, the responsibility for our own characters because we all have the opportunity to learn to improve our characters through time.

Hursthouse argues that we need reasons for action: that even if we act virtuously, we need to have reasons about and for virtuous action. Moral action she defines as acting *from virtue* - "acting from a settled state of good character". It is neither necessary nor sufficient to have the explicit thoughts about right action, obligation or principle; we still need reasons to act morally. All these aspects: reason, emotion, education and beliefs, constitute

CHAPTER 4

‘character’. And, argues Hursthouse, it is character as a whole and not some one feature of it that motivates. She concludes her chapters on moral motivation with:

...(W)hat is both necessary and sufficient for a virtuous act to be ‘morally motivated’ is that it is done from a state of character that adequately resembles the state of character from which the perfectly virtuous agent acts. (Hursthouse *On Virtue Ethics* 1999, 159 – 60)

She argues that ascribing moral motivation, “because she thought it was right”, is ascribing something that goes far beyond the moment of action. It makes a claim about what sort of person the agent is – a claim that “goes all the way down”.²⁸ That is why it is an important feature of our ethical thought: “we can give no higher praise to an agent with respect to her action than to ascribe it”.²⁹ The consequence of this, argues Hursthouse is that we do not need the (first-person) thoughts ‘This is right, virtuous, noble, my obligation’ or what have you. They are not necessary for moral motivation nor are they sufficient: the (third-person) ascription of a character trait is so significant and profound that no further mechanisms of motivation are needed.

Conclusion

One of the important shifts of emphasis that takes place in this chapter is that particularity and diversity of situation are no longer the determining features of moral experience. The emphasis on virtue combines the aspect of a unique, individual or personal perspective with striving towards a common goal – flourishing lives. Focussing on virtue means making character and flourishing lives the prime objects of normative investigation and this means that virtue-orientated care ethics focuses on the self and its capacities rather than merely developing a response to the ‘normative pull’ of caring.

I have examined two kinds of virtue-orientated care ethics: one based on naturalism (the maternal thinkers are the best examples) and a more socially orientated virtue ethics, namely Halwani’s account. I rejected the former as being based on a naturalistic fallacy – if being virtuous is ‘naturally’ present, then we hardly need a theory to support it. The addition of McDowell’s

²⁸ Hursthouse, 1999, 160. “Going all the way down” is difficult to define – hence the deliberate vagueness of the phrase - but means something like ‘is significant’, ‘touches the essence of’, ‘is deep-rooted’.

²⁹ *Op cit*, 160.

“reflective naturalism” to the discussion on virtue and Foot’s idea of a “fit” between nature and reason brings the discussion back into the realm of virtue ethics.

The alternative approach to naturalism is to argue that virtue is necessary for social flourishing. If Halwani can prove that caring is necessary for social welfare, then we have grounds for arguing that virtue-orientated care ethics is indeed ethical. Halwani’s arguments are extremely general: he argues that intimate relations are essentially characterised by caring and therefore the necessity of caring to a flourishing life is established. He fails to present compelling arguments for why we necessarily need to be caring in order to flourish and therefore that caring is a primary virtue. Although I cannot conceive of a flourishing life (whatever this is has not been specified) without caring, this does not convince me that therefore caring is a virtue. (I cannot conceive of a flourishing life without humour - but this does not make humour a virtue.)

Hursthouse’s virtue account of motivation I find more compelling than the previous accounts because she has a holistic notion of character and what it takes to be motivated. She argues that one needs reasons to convince oneself that what one is doing is right and that these reasons are not random but are consistent with one’s character. Thus one does not do virtuous deeds as much as act from virtue. Virtue does not lie in human nature or in human flourishing but in stable (learned and acquired) character ascription, she argues. Virtue, in this perspective, is not natural but acquired. I could very well imagine caring - in part - being an acquired skill. It is, after all, something that happens in relation to the cared-for and the success of caring can be measured in terms of how the cared-for responds.

What is primarily missing from this virtue-orientated account however is the aspect of the compelling and necessary character of caring as described by Noddings and Frankfurt. The virtue-orientated perspective has added the notion of the agent with stable and reasoning virtuous dispositions but it is as if the scale has swung too far over towards this stable and reasoning agent. Where is the one-caring in the grip of a concern for something that he cannot and is unwilling to relinquish? Where is the compelling urge to care, the irresistible motivation to invest in the future of someone?

In the following chapter I shall focus on a very different approach to how caring can be seen as compelling. I shall look at a refurbished concept of obligation with the aim of showing how endorsement makes moral motivation work.